

Standards for Public Benefit

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President, ASTM

Dr. Brown, Mr. Kammer, Dr. Collins, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are here today to celebrate a momentous occasion: the centennial anniversary of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. It is a pleasure to be with friends and colleagues who have come today to congratulate this institution and its people, and to say thank you for a long and distinguished service to this Nation.

I have been asked to speak today about the standards partnership that exists between NIST and ASTM and how that partnership has produced standards for the public benefit. Without doubt, these are the facts. But the history we share has much more to teach us than the fact that we could produce standards together. Governments and private citizens produce standards together all over the world. It is, rather, how we did it. The partnership we are celebrating today is a microcosm, a snapshot of this country's history. It is the story of what set us apart from the rest of the world, the story of how a government and its citizens came to share a common purpose and achieve a common goal in an atmosphere of equanimity and balance.

This partnership is a model for governments and private institutions everywhere, a model in which we can take pride, a model that has proven, time and again, what great strides in progress can be made when public institutions and private institutions are willing to abandon traditional roles and old ideas. Our partnership has refuted the idea that public and private institutions are destined to be defined by authority and mutual mistrust.

At the turn of the last century, when ASTM and NIST came onto the American scene, we were a nation on the move. Literally. We were building the great railroads. Steel producers worked night and day to fill the ever-increasing demands of the burgeoning railroad system, making the United States the most prolific steel producer in the world. In the midst of this unprecedented boom, we hit a wall: train derailments by the thousands. Broken rails, broken wheels, and broken flanges and axles began to take a terrible toll on American lives and the American economy. Desperate railroad companies began to import their rails from Great Britain.

In 1898, 70 members of a new association, the American Chapter of the International Association for Testing Materials, met in Philadelphia to discuss the prospects of organizing committees of companies and customers to develop testing methods for iron, steel, and other materials. Three years later, the U.S. Congress chartered the first physical science laboratory of the federal government, the National Bureau of Standards. By 1912, NBS was performing materials research on the iron and steel constituents of the railroad industry, research that advanced and enhanced the specifications that had been developed by the steel companies and the railroad companies in what is now ASTM. American railroads began to be reliable and safe again; and a unique partnership had been forged. Almost a hundred years later, it is stronger than ever.

When we consulted ASTM's membership roster last week, we counted 194 NIST scientists among its ranks. NIST's Annual Report to OMB reported that in the period October 1998 to September 1999, NIST scientists held 572 ASTM units of participation, an astonishing number which far surpassed any like number related to any other private standards developing organization. At a time when there is a general government agency decline in participation in standards activities, it represents the commitment of NIST to our partnership, and to the work of producing standards for public benefit. While this number is important, we can only use it to measure units of activity. There is no method yet devised, however, whereby we can measure the talent and dedication NIST scientists bring to the work of ASTM. To our NIST technical partners therefore, I can only extend my deepest gratitude and thanks.

Dr. Branscomb, if you are in the audience now, I would like to acknowledge your presence. It was during Dr. Branscomb's term as Director, in the seventies, that NBS made some very important decisions, decisions that more clearly articulated the relationship between us, decisions that brought all of us into a more enlightened age. It was during this time that NBS shifted many of its Voluntary Standards Program activities to private sector organizations, opting not to compete, but to supplement private sector programs. It was also during the seventies that NBS decided to become more active in voluntary standardization activities at the policy level, a decision ASTM welcomed wholeheartedly. Soon

service, not only to ASTM, but to our entire community, came at a time when standards development was coming to be recognized by policy makers and industrial leaders as a critical element in the globalization of industry and international trade. We had no national standards strategy to help us cope with our changing world. At an ANSI Board meeting, Ray challenged us to develop one. Ray, your instincts, insights, and guidance have been invaluable to ASTM; and your involvement with the voluntary standards system in this country is very deeply appreciated. Thank you for your help and support.

In 1993, during my first full year as President of ASTM, I had the pleasure of partnering with a NIST scientist named Nancy Trahey. At that time, she was the Chairman of the ASTM Board of Directors, and the second woman in ASTM's history ever to be elected to the Chair. She was an outstanding Chair and remains a great friend. ASTM was the clear beneficiary of her steady, skilful leadership. Thank you, Nancy. Today, as in times past, a NIST scientist still serves on ASTM's Board of Directors, Dr. Leslie Smith. There are other NIST people here and not here, too numerous to mention, who have served on other ASTM policy-making committees. NIST members have brought to our process everything from measurement infrastructures and basic research to—to quote Ray Kammer—"the management of the battlefields for economic competitiveness." Dr. Belinda Collins, whose hard work and dedication I wish also to acknowledge here today, has been a partner who has shouldered some of the heaviest burdens and most difficult challenges of our day, not the least of which was the development of the National Standards Strategy. Thank you, Belinda, for your tireless stewardship.

Time will not permit me to describe the range and depth of our partnership, which goes far beyond the development of standards, but I will mention three outstanding collaborative efforts: (1) Our Cement and Concrete Reference Laboratory partnership, started in 1929, a Research Associate Program in which the manager is a non-government employee and the staff is supported by ASTM; (2) Our Standard Reference Materials partnership, another Research Associate Program begun in 1976 to provide standard reference materials for the nation's metals industry. It now includes glass and fine particle metrology and is managed by our past Chairman of the Board, Nancy Trahey; and (3) Our Grants and Contracts Program that has served to accelerate standards development and the transfer of

technology to the marketplace through the resulting standards. These collaborations are all success stories whose implications and effects have been felt worldwide. NIST and ASTM have shared in the outreach to developing countries, co-hosting delegations from around the world. ASTM's Washington Representative, Helen Delaney, became the NIST Standards Attaché to the U.S. Mission to the European Union. ASTM has appeared before Congressional Committees and testified time and again in support of funding for NIST; an act of partnership we will repeat whenever given the opportunity. Together we have supported the implementation of the OMB Circular A-119 and the National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act, instruments that have brought us closer together, instruments that have enhanced and strengthened our partnership.

No other country in the world, even the most democratized, has a standards infrastructure that is built on our concept of a government-private sector partnership. Our system has often made it difficult for us to fit into a world where standards systems are characterized more by legislative or authoritative involvement than by an equal partnership where government is part of the process. However, one has only to look around to see what this partnership for the public benefit has produced: standards that have seen us successfully through two world wars, standards that have restored and sustained our environment, standards that reflect unhampered invention and innovation, standards that make our products household names around the globe, standards of inimitable quality and relevance. Our standards are the measurement of unprecedented prosperity, levels of health and safety, and a quality of life that is unparalleled anywhere. Our standards are the irrefutable result of our way of life, and our partnership.

And so, on this important day, at the dawn of your second century, I bring you ASTM's best wishes. When our railroads needed us, we were there. We set our sights on their survival and success; and the public benefited. Our country benefited. The goal we set out to achieve almost a hundred years ago—to promulgate valid and accurate standards, standards that would promote trade, standards that would increase the quality of life for our citizens, standards that would measure the best of who we are as a nation—is as valid and viable as it was then. May it continue as the basis of our partnership for the next hundred years.

Happy Anniversary.